After the Silence the Echo

Jeanine Leane

After the silence there's an echo.
An echo is a sound bouncing back through time

repeating

an echo is a sound that curves around to
re-sound again …
and again …
and again …

An echo is the sound of the past
as it screams

down

through

time
through the barrel of a gun

at the end of a knife
from the thud of a stirrup iron.

An echo is resounding.

Silence is not peace

Jeanine Leane

Governor Brisbane, 1824:

> AND WHEREAS, by Experience, it hath been found, many times, Bloodshed may be stopped by the Use of Arms against the Natives beyond the ordinary Rule of Law in Time of Peace; and, for this End, Resort to summary Justice has become necessary — NOW THEREFORE, by Virtue of the Authority in me vested by His Majesty's Royal Commission, I do declare, in Order to restore Tranquillity, MARTIAL LAW TO BE IN FORCE IN ALL THE COUNTRY WEST-WARD OF MOUNT YORK;

Outside the frame: colonial oxymoron

Bloodshed may be stopped by
Use of Arms against the Natives
in Order to restore Tranquillity.

Two hundred years after they were proclaimed, the words of colonial governor Thomas Brisbane still echo for Wiradyuri peoples of the Wambuul (Macquarie River). Brisbane ordered a tranquillity, a silence. *A silencing*.

But silence is not peace. Just as colonial history is not the past. It is just one story that tries to erase, by brutal force, all other stories of time; of place; of peoples.

Dhuluny in the first language of place, Wiradyuri, means "truth" and "that which is direct". The artworks, installations and images in the exhibition that bears the same name, curated by Wiradyuri/Kamilaroi curator Jonathan Jones with Wirribee Aunty Leanna Carr, are a resounding echo; one of the many echoes of the Wiradyuri peoples that have continued two centuries after Brisbane attempted to silence the voices, exterminate peoples, and extinguish the cultural practices and languages of the Wiradyuri and all other First Nations peoples in a colonial genocide that ultimately failed. The cost, the damage inflicted wilfully on lives, cultures, languages, was high. But we remain and we remember.

Dhuluny: the war that never ended is a gathering of Wiradyuri and settler works. Settler works appear in the conventional form of framed watercolours that hang flat against the wall. Wiradyuri works make use of many mediums, ranging from acrylic on canvas, to recycled materials such as salvaged refuse, to textiles, sculpture, photography, film, weaving, print, lino-cut and digitisation.

Interspersed between the works of Wiradyuri artists are the settler paintings of English-born artists John William Lewin and Augustus Earle. Lewin is recorded as being the first official artist in the colony of New South Wales, 1800–19. Lewin accompanied Lachlan Macquarie during his 1815 expedition to invade what became the Bathurst Plains for agricultural and pastoral merit. Lewin recorded the journey in a series of 21 drawings, among them a portrait of "Saturday", a Wiradyuri man encountered by Lewin on the Bathurst Plains believed to have been Windradyne. Augustus Earle arrived in 1825 and quickly established a reputation as the colony's leading watercolourist. Earle was well known for his paintings of landscapes, Aboriginal subjects, public and private buildings that record the development of the colony, and portraits of colonial governors such as Thomas Brisbane.

Lewin's depiction of *The Plains, Bathurst*, ca. 1815–16, centres the colonial tent of Macquarie, marked by a British ensign. A few settler huts flank each side. The red military uniforms and muskets of the invading soldiers are visible on the slope in the foreground. The tent, acquired by Macquarie from India and used extensively by him in his travels throughout the colony, is elevated on a hill. On the other side of the Wambuul (Macquarie River) smoke rises from a campfire tended by a lone Wiradyuri figure, intending to contrast a shrinking Aboriginal presence against an encroaching colonial settlement. Lewin's paintings *The Plains, Sidmouth Valley, Sidmouth Valley showing Macquarie River* and *Macquarie River*, ca. 1815–16, depict a quiet serenity across open grasslands, absent of any Aboriginal presence. Earle's image of *Bathurst Plains and Settlement. New South Wales*, ca. 1825–28, presents a cleared landscape with settler homesteads and fences looming large on the horizon. Two solitary Wiradyuri figures sit on the ground a short distance away from the tent. On the other side of the tent are two colonial officers; one seated, one standing.

The demure colours, fine lines and tranquil pastoral scenes painted by colonial artists Augustus Earle and John William Lewin present a slim veneer for the deeper histories and now-seething injustices. Within the frames of these historical works, Wiradyuri people are shadowy, menacing presences that haunt the colonial landscape.
These images are surrounded by and face-to-face with the works of Wirribee Leanna Carr, Lorraine Connelly-Northey, Karla Dickens, Kevin Gilbert, Jazz Money, Michael Riley, HJ Wedge and Lucy Williams-Connelly, and a historical collection of stone tools made by unknown Wiradyuri ancestors.

The contrast is striking. The statement unmistakeable. The works are curated to place Country first and last. Settler works are surrounded by Wiradyuri works and voices. Lewin's historical portraits of Aboriginal figures are dwarfed by the mixed-media artwork of Karla Dickens depicting hooded self-portraits, wearing Klan-like masks that lay bare the powerful and damaging legacies of colonialism and patriarchy. The false serenity of Lewin's *The Plains, Bathurst* is interrupted by the juxtapositions of Dicken's statue *Four Horsemen of the Western Plains*, 2021, wherein four riderless horses are stacked vertically and saddled with pastoral paraphernalia. Michael Riley's *flyblown*, 1998, photographs capture the pillage and destruction of Country post-invasion, shouting back historical truths to the benign landscapes of Lewin hung beside them.

remains of context, 2024, by Jazz Money takes some of Brisbane's words from the original 1824 Declaration of Martial Law and responds to them with a poetic response of contemporary resistance and continuance. Photographs by Wirribee Aunty Leanna Carr of living Country titled *Bangayadilinya*, 2024, and Kevin Gilbert's lino-cut *Massacre Mountain*, 1965, speak back truth to the triumphant landscape of Augustus Earle. While Gilbert's image depicts the closeness and brutality of Aboriginal genocide, Aboriginal presence and Aboriginal continuance can be seen in the background.

HJ Wedge's painting *Returning Stolen Goods,* 1994, is a tender reminder of the intergenerational trauma caused by the Stolen Generations and the ongoing need for recompense, while the historical collection of Wiradyuri stone tools evidence the resilience and continuance of Wiradyuri story and culture. *Possum-skin cloaks: Waradgerie Winnowers*, 2024, by Lorraine Connelly-Northey, made from salvaged metal and wire, and Lucy Williams-Connelly's dillybags woven from tufts of sheep's wool, refashion colonial refuse as Wiradyuri resistance.

The Wiradyuri artists' works in *Dhuluny: the war that never ended* effect a face-to-face reckoning. In the words of Bunjalung poet Evelyn Araluen, these works are "staring back" at the settler landscapes, at the lies and destruction, two hundred years after Governor Thomas Brisbane tried to silence us. These works say loud and clear, strong and proud: *We are still here! And, you are now in our gaze.*

The echo comes back

to break the silence

again …
and again …
and again …

now …
as then …
as now …

As always.

Dhuluny: the war that never ended
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Bathurst Regional Art Gallery